

LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST MINUTES OF THE CABINET

02 November 2023 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT:

Chair:	Councillor Grace Williams	Leader of the Council
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Clyde Loakes	Deputy Leader (Climate and Air Quality)
	Councillor Naheed Asghar	Portfolio Lead Member - Health and Wellbeing
	Councillor Paul Douglas	Portfolio Lead Member - Finance and Resources
	Councillor Kizzy Gardiner	Portfolio Lead Member - Children and Young People
	Councillor Ahsan Khan	Deputy Leader (Housing and Regeneration)
	Councillor Louise Mitchell	Portfolio Lead Member - Adults
	Councillor Elizabeth Baptiste	Cabinet Commissioner - Renters
	Councillor Catherine Deakin	Cabinet Commissioner - Health Equity
	Councillor Rosalind Doré	Cabinet Commissioner - Destinations
	Councillor Sharon Waldron	Cabinet Commissioner - Housing Transformation

(Cabinet Commissioners are appointed by the Leader to assist Cabinet in leading engagement with our community on four key priorities for the Council and to support our borough to recover from the pandemic. These Councillors are not Members of the Cabinet and do not have any voting rights nor decision-making powers.)

Officers in Attendance:

Linzi Roberts-Egan	Chief Executive
Ian Buckle	Head of Electoral and Democratic Services
Shazia Hussain	Deputy Chief Executive
Mark Hynes	Director of Governance and Law
Anthony Jackson	Democratic Services Officer
Rob Manning	Strategic Director, Resources
Stewart Murray	Strategic Director, Place
Debbie Porter	Strategic Director, Neighbourhoods and Environment
Chris Spencer	Interim Strategic Director, People

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Vicky Ashworth and Khevyn Limbajee.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gardiner declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 as one of the buildings and leasing, referred to in the report, is a building used by Waltham Forest Samaritans. Councillor Gardiner is a member of staff at Waltham Forest Samaritans.

45. MINUTES OF CABINET

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 5 October 2023, were approved a correct record.

46. FINANCIAL MONITORING: MONTH 6 (SEPTEMBER)

Councillor Douglas introduced the report.

Decision

Cabinet approved Additional funding for SEND of £321,700 across 2023/24 and 2024/25 for SEND Service Manager, Improvement Lead and three case officers to support the delivery of SEND Statutory duties to be funded from the Budget Strategy Reserve.

47. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

Councillor Douglas introduced the report and, in doing so, referred to the short term measures that had been introduced to reduce costs and increase income.

The Leader stated that demand and expectation were rising in relation to the Council's services and highlighted the importance of changing such services to bring about better outcomes. She said that the report detailed the Council's long term approach to meet existing financial challenges and said that, until then, the Council would look at budget savings alongside the Council's key priorities, such as improving services for residents, looking at how the Council used data to address need and working closely with partner organisations.

Councillor Loakes stated that there was continued lobbying for further funding, particularly for more vulnerable residents. He added that the Council would work with partner organisations to lobby for a better deal in LBWF.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) noted potential funding gap of £20-30m as per paragraph 3.1.9 of the report;
- (2) noted the immediate response as set out in paragraph 3.2 and the longer-term transformational approach as set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report; and
- (3) delegated to the Strategic Director of Resources the authority to distribute any contingency budgets and/or reserves, as described in paragraph 3.1.10 of the report, as per the Council's financial ground rules.

48. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Councillor Douglas introduced the report.

The Leader pointed out that residents were suffering from the financial crisis and that the support scheme was a key avenue in which to support residents.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) recommended to Full Council that the current Council Tax Support Scheme continues whereby the maximum award available to working aged people receiving support remains at 85% for the Council Tax billing year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025;
- (2) recommended to Full Council that the Council continue to make £750,000 available for a Discretionary Hardship Fund under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 2012, to offer additional help and support to those suffering the greatest financial hardship as defined in the Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Hardship Scheme published on the Council's website. The current 2023/24 scheme is attached at Appendix 2 to the report;
- (3) delegated responsibility to make any minor and consequential changes necessary to the detailed provision as a result of any changes in the regulations upon which the scheme is based, is given to the Strategic Director of Resources following consultation with the Portfolio Lead Member for Finance and Resources;
- (4) agreed that, like Housing Benefit, the scheme will continue to fully disregard War Disablement, War Widows & War Widowers pensions for all applicants. Other incomes, for example, Child Benefit and disability benefits such as Personal Independence Payments will also continue to be ignored when calculating entitlement to Council Tax Support;
- (5) noted that the remaining provisions of the Council's scheme for 2024/25 will be as published on the Council's website;

- (6) noted that the projected cost of the whole scheme is identified as £19.92 million which is £1.632 million more than the 2023/24 MTFS provision. This will be reflected in the calculation of the council tax base for 2024/25 and included within the next MTFS as part of the budget setting process. The additional £1.632 million needed to fund the scheme will come from dedicated earmarked reserve of recovered housing benefit overpayment debts; and
- (7) noted that before any significant changes to the scheme reducing or removing support could be made that a statutory consultation would need to be carried out.

49. INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

Councillor Douglas introduced the report and, in doing so, stated that the workforce was the Council's greatest asset. He then gave thanks to Joy Hulme – Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Rosie Tulloch – Programme Manager. Councillor Douglas added that LBWF needed to become an employer of first choice.

The Leader said that in order for the Council to change for the better, it was important to recognise the efforts of existing staff and to give them a reason to want to stay at LBWF and develop. She then gave thanks to Shazia Hussain and her team for their hard work.

Councillor Waldron stated that she was pleased with the report and agreed that staff were the Council's greatest asset and the importance of ensuring that LBWF was an employer of choice.

Decision

Cabinet noted and agreed the Council's Inclusion Action Plan at Appendix 1 to the report.

50. ENABLING VCS GROWTH THROUGH OUR VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR PROPERTY ESTATE

Councillor Khan introduced the report and, in doing so, gave thanks to Shazia Hussain's and Stewart Murray's respective teams for their hard work. He also gave thanks to Councillor Ashworth for her work in this area.

The Leader echoed Councillor Khan's words of thanks and also thanked Councillor Khan for his leadership.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) endorsed the policy framework and principles of a VCS Leasing Policy attached as Appendix 2 to the report;

- (2) approved further consultation with VCS tenants and wider stakeholders on these principles and development of the policy in full; and
- (3) noted that the policy will be piloted with an initial tranche of approximately 13 VCS Tenants over the forthcoming year, with the full policy returning to Cabinet for approval in approximately 12 months.

51. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

No members of the public or press were present at the meeting.

52. ACQUISITION OF AFFORDABLE HOMES AND WALTHAM FOREST'S REFUGEE HOUSING PROGRAMME

Councillor Khan introduced the report and, in doing so, said that the report demonstrated the Council's commitment to creating a borough of sanctuary. He gave thanks to Shazia Hussain, Stewart Murray and their respective teams.

The Leader stated that the report was the result of a joined-up effort and that it was a privilege to be involved. She then spoke of the quality of relationships with internal departments, such as Early Help and Health, which had helped with addressing wider housing pressures. The Leader gave thanks to all officers involved.

Decision

Cabinet:

- (1) agreed that, subject to the Corporate Director of Housing, in consultation the Strategic Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Governance and Law, agreeing to the terms upon which the grant funding is provided, the Council may enter into grant agreements with the Greater London Authority (£15.4m) and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (£2.4m) in respect of funding for affordable homes for the purpose of providing accommodation to refugees;
- (2) approved a budget, as set out in the exempt Appendix A to the report, for the acquisition of:
 - (a) Alba and Salix House, Leyton from Pocket Living, consisting of 197 homes – 117 homes to rent to refugee household, along with an enabling investment of 80 Shared Ownership homes; and
 - (b) 11 street properties to rent to refugee households – eight as temporary accommodation and three as settled accommodation;
- (3) approve £38.6m of borrowing to fund the longer term net borrowing requirement of the schemes;
- (4) noted the short term revenue requirement on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the impact on HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

- (5) agreed that the Council acquire the freehold of Alba House and Salix House for the sum as set out in Appendix A and Appendix B to the report,
- (6) approved the acquisition of 11 street properties, 3 to rent to refugee households and 8 to use for temporary accommodation;
- (7) delegated the final terms of the acquisition of Alba House, Salix House and the 11 street properties to the Corporate Director of Housing, in consultation with the Commercial Director, Property and Delivery, and the Strategic Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Governance and Law;
- (8) agreed that the 80 properties in Salix House shall be disposed of under Shared Ownership leases on the open market;
- (9) delegated to the Corporate Director of Housing, in consultation the Strategic Director of Resources and Corporate Director of Governance and Law authority, the decision to determine the most appropriate method through which the Council will provide the accommodation. This will be through the creation of a local lettings policy (if so advised) and amendments to housing policies which govern the letting of properties by the Council. This may include consideration of using fixed-term tenancies. This will be as necessary to ensure that the requirement, as set out in the GLA's funding guidance, that these properties remain affordable in perpetuity to support the Council's wider housing and homelessness responsibilities is met.

The meeting closed at 2.24 pm

Chair's Signature _____

Date _____